Planning Standards/Guidelines

Those of you have been in the field for some time will remember that PLA had very clearly defined quantitative standards which could be applied on a *per capita* basis. In the academic world, the ACRL used Minimum Planning Guidelines for Academic Libraries based on FTE students and faculty. These were often applied to evaluate library services for an institution's accreditation. Professional organizations moved away from these standards as they developed detailed planning processes that were performance and level of effort based. The ALA has published the "Planning for Results" series for many years. These include a detailed process, worksheets and community activities for evaluating library service.

Some jurisdictions developed their own standards to establish parity among their jurisdictions. A few that come to mind are Connecticut State Library, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, New York, Mid-Hudson Library System, Illinois State Library, Massachusetts State Library, Fresno County Public Library, and Los Angeles County Public Library. Most of these, framed as Minimum Guidelines were developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and many have since been abandoned. Recently cities in California have developed Facilities Master Plans; e.g., Santa Clarita and Sacramento, which develop their own per capita guidelines and are used to right size new library projects. These guidelines typically range from .3 square feet per capita to .6 square feet per capita for branch libraries and .5 to 1 square foot per capita for main libraries. (These numbers are consistent with the library constructed with funds from the 2000 California Bond Act, but as many of these communities have experienced exponential growth, the per capitas have fallen below their own guidelines.)

The total square feet per capita is developed from per capita guidelines for collections (ranging from 2 to 4+ items per capita), reader seats (ranging from 2.5 to 5 per 1,000 residents), public technology (ranging from .5 to 1 PC per 1,000), meeting spaces (at approx. 2.5 per 1,000 residents) and back of house support space at 10 – 15% of the total square footage. Some jurisdictions have additional minimum requirements including a meeting room with at least 75 seats (or 100), at least one group study room, a homework center, and at least one story-time area to seat up to 50. Sacramento Public Library developed a sliding scale in their Facility Master Plan which identified the formulae based on level of effort.

Mathematically if one applies 2.5 items per capita, 2.5 reader seats per 1,000, 1 PC per 1,000 residents, 2.5 meeting seats per 1,000 residents, and 12% back of house allowance, the resulting square footage will approximately equal .5 (assignable) square feet per capita. The .5 square feet per capita does include the circulation allowance (Net to gross markup) The Gross Square Footage is required for the building to function. A library building will require an additional 25 to 35% of the total space for mechanical, electrical, circulation, elevators, stairways, lobbies, restrooms, and the thickness of walls which can use up to 7% of the total space. Assignable Square Feet (ASF) is the floor area assigned to a program use. Gross Square Feet or GSF is the total square footage inside a string that is wrapped around the entire building. ASF + 30% = GSF.

Recently, libraries have shifted their focus from collections to people spaces with a decrease in the number of items per capita and an increase in the number of user spaces per capita. Recently construction projects show approximately 25% of total space for collections (down from an historic 40%) and reader/user spaces increasing from 20% to 30%. For many reasons, this is a good decision. Multi-library jurisdictions have become adept at moving materials to serve their customers' requests. Newer jurisdictions or those adding new facilities to support expanding communities, can never catch up with

older jurisdictions that have been building collections for many years. To build expensive and valuable library space, for collections that may never be purchased – and to open facilities with vast areas of empty shelves, can be judged to be short-sighted and irresponsible use of public funds. If anyone has a crystal ball that can predict the future of print beyond the next 20 years… please contact me.

In lieu of creating guidelines, many jurisdictions develop benchmarks with cities, counties, or branches within cities and counties, that are similar demographically. Cities typically have identified eight to ten similar jurisdictions to develop comparative data for purposes of contract negotiations. In California, we are fortunate to have a state library that gathers very useful annual data that identifies the size of library service area (LSA) and annual input and output data.

Using the basic minimum planning guidelines adopted by a local jurisdiction would yield the following for a population of 30,000 LSA at .5 Square Feet per capita and .6 Square Feet per capita.

Guidelines	Qty	ASF Required
Collections @ 2.5 items per capita	75,000	5,000
Seats @ 2.5 per 1,000	75	2,250
Meeting Room Seats Minimum	75	1,125
Public PC	30	1,050
Group Study Rooms	2	300
Staff/Support Space		1,200
Total ASF		10,925
Total GSF = .5 SF per capita	@ 70% efficiency	15,607

Using this guideline, collections occupy 50% of the assignable square footage.

Modified to .6 Square Feet per capita and increasing user space to 4 per 1000, collections occupy 40% of the space.

Guidelines	Qty	ASF Required
Collections @ 2.5 items per capita	75,000	5,000
Seats @ 4 per 1,000	120	3,600
Meeting Room Seats Minimum	100	1,500
Public PC	24	840
Group Study Rooms	2	300
Staff/Support Space		1,200
Total ASF		12,440
Total GSF = .6 SF per capita	@ 70% efficiency	17,771

This is a simplified version of application of a guideline. If a library enjoys a high circulation, the total square footage for collections will decrease because the items that are checked out do not require shelf space. A higher percentage of children's books will use less collection space. Laptops to loan use less space than fixed in place PC workstations. Detailed space planning and programming will identify a more precise space requirement, but the basic menu includes these elements and can provide a quick space need.

There are also guidelines for branches per square mile and optimum distance from center of population to locate a branch. Recent benchmarks have showed an ideal of 11 to 12 square miles per branch

(except for large geographic jurisdictions) for customers to travel or dense urban areas where a more useful guidelines would be branch per population served.

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